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Fellow Ray Escapee Slain In Brushy Mountain Cell

By A Staff Reporter

PETROS, Tenn. — One of the six inmates who escaped briefly from Brushy Mountain State Prison with James Earl Ray in 1977 was stabbed to death in his cell Saturday with a metal "sticker" made from a spoon handle, authorities said.

David Lee Powell, 30, of 615 Lucy in Memphis, who was serving a 100-year sentence for the 1972 murder of a movie house cashier, died at Oak Ridge Hospital about 3 p.m. of multiple stab wounds to the face, neck and chest.

Morgan County Sheriff's deputies said Powell's cellmate, Luther Davis, 21, also of Memphis, was charged in the incident. A spokesman there said a motive has not yet been established but that Davis, who was placed in administrative segregation at the prison, would be questioned Monday.

The stabbing occurred at 12:45 p.m. as inmates were finishing lunch in their cells, said Kay Bradshaw, prison information director. She said there were no witnesses to the killing.

Powell was convicted of first-degree murder in October, 1972, and sentenced to 100 years in prison for the shooting death of Mary Pearcy, 58, on Jan. 22 that year at the old Malco Theatre at 197 South Main.

I remember her.

Three years later, he escaped the state penitentiary in Nashville when two inmates threw him to the top of a 9-foot high wall in the prison recreation yard. Powell was recaptured three days later in a south Nashville grocery store.

After his transfer to Brushy Mountain, Powell joined Ray, the convicted killer of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and five other inmates who on June 10, 1977, climbed over the prison wall using a ladder made from pieces of pipe they had collected. Powell was captured the following day but Ray and the other inmates were at large for several days before finally being captured.

Powell leaves his father and stepmother, Mr. and Mrs. Sherman Powell of Memphis; four sisters, Ms. Louise Powell and Ms. Shirley Powell, both of Memphis, Ms. Linda Powell and Ms. Nora Brown, both of Los Angeles, and four brothers, Charles Powell of Memphis, Samuel Powell and James A. Brown, both of Los Angeles, and Tommy Brown of Houston, Texas.

N. J. Ford & Sons Funeral Home has charge.